

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: ECON, PINT, CA
SUBJECT: LEVESQUE AND BUSINESS GROUP QUARREL

1. HOSTILITY WHICH HAS ALWAYS BEEN PRESENT IN RELATIONS BETWEEN PQ AND BUSINESS SECTOR BROKE INTO OPEN AGAIN ON FEBRUARY 17 WHEN CONSEIL DU PATRONAT, A GROUP REPRESENTING QUEBEC EMPLOYERS, PRESENTED PREMIER LEVESQUE WITH A BRIEF ON QUEBEC ECONOMIC SITUATION. AS HAS TOO FREQUENTLY BEEN CASE IN RECENT DAYS, LEVESQUE REACTED ANGRILY, CALLING BRIEF A POLITICAL PAMPHLET, AND STATING THAT BUSINESSMEN SHOULD EXPECT TO BE TREATED BRUTALLY IF THEY CHOOSE TO PLAY IN POLITICAL ARENA.

2. CIRCUMSTANCES OF ENCOUNTER WERE UNFAVORABLE TO BEGIN WITH, AND THERE ARE UNDOUBTEDLY SOME WHO FEEL LEVESQUE'S PIQUE WAS JUSTIFIED. WHEN LEVESQUE POSTPONED MEETING WITH DIRECTORS OF THE CONSEIL FOR SEVERAL HOURS BECAUSE OF CABINET MEETINGS IN QUEBEC CITY, CONSEIL WENT AHEAD WITH PRESS CONFERENCE AND RELEASED BRIEF, THEREBY ANGERING LEVESQUE WHO UNDER USUAL PRACTICE SHOULD HAVE BEEN ENTITLED TO SEE BRIEF BEFORE IT WAS RELEASED TO PRESS. MOREOVER, CONSEIL PRESIDENT PIERRE DES MARAIS MADE STATEMENT AT PRESS CONFERENCE CRITICIZING PQ MINISTERS - LAURIN,
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PAYETTE, BEDARD, MAROIS, LANDRY -- WHO HAVE BEEN INTEMPERATE IN THEIR LANGUAGE TOWARD BUSINESS COMMUNITY. LEVESQUE LATER ADMITTED THAT HE WAS ANGRY AND THAT PQ OFFICIALS WHO WERE AWARE OF PRESS CONFERENCE HAD ADVISED HIM TO BOYCOTT MEETING.

3. BRIEF COMPLAINED ABOUT UNCERTAINTY IN QUEBEC -- STEMMING BOTH FROM CONCERN ABOUT SEPARATION AND FROM AMBIGUITY OF PQ'S POSITION

TOWARD PRIVATE ENTERPRISE -- WHICH HAS PLACED DAMPER ON ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. SPECIFICALLY, IT CALLED ON PQ TO ORGANIZE REFERENDUM AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, TO MAINTAIN ITS CREDIBILITY IN PRE-REFERENDUM PERIOD SO THAT GOVERNMENT WILL RETAIN ITS BARGAINING POWER WITH OTTAWA AND OTHER PROVINCES, TO CREATE ATMOSPHERE WHICH WOULD ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVATE TNERPRISE, AND TO TAKE ACTION TO ASSURE THAT PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS BE MORE RESPECTFUL OF VIEWS OF ALL CITIZENS IN ORDER FAVOR MUTUAL RESPECT AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE.

4. COMMENT: IMPORTANCE OF CONSEIL - LEVESQUE ENCOUNTER WAS NOT IN BRIEF, WHICH SAID LITTLE NEW OR IMPORTANT, BUT AS ANOTHER SIGN OF DETERIORATING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PQ AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY. AS ONE REPORTED SUGGESTED, PQ'S RELATIONS WITH BUSINESS ARE BEGINNING TO RESEMBLE BOURASSA'S RELATIONS WITH LABOR. BRIEF WAS CERTAINLY CORRECT IN CALLING ATTENTION TO ANTI-BUSINESS BIAS OF MANY WITHIN PQ GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS LISE PAYETTE WHO HAS SAID THAT SHE HAS NOTING TO DO WITH "BUSINESSMEN". OTHERS HAVE POINTED OUT THAT ANTI-BUSINESS SENTIMENT IS DEEP ROOTED IN QUEBEC, WHERE FRANCOPHONE CULTURE HAS ALWAYS TENDED TO VIEW BUSINESSMEN AS PARIAHS. (SEE PIERRE LAURIN SPEECH POUCHED EUR/CAN FEB. 16) AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT BEFORE, PQ GOVERNMENT HAS MANAGED TO OFFEND IMPORTANT SEGMENTS OF QUEBEC VOTERS -- LABOR, WOMEN, BUSINESS, AND CIVIL SERVANTS -- AND LATEST OUTBURST WON'T HELP, PARTICULARLY SINCE THERE APPEARS TO BE INCREASING PERCEPTION OF PQ AS ATTEMPTING TO DISCREDIT ANY WHO QUESTION ITS POLICIES.

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